

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)

COVID-19 FAQ for Early Childhood Professionals



Disclaimer: This document is a supplement to, not a replacement of, the ECECD Health and Safety requirements. Please refer to ECECD's mandated COVID-19 requirements for child care providers found at nmececd.org/covid-19 for further information.

Masking

1. *Why are we requiring 2-year-olds to wear masks? It does not seem developmentally appropriate.*

Masking is one of the best things we can do as a state to reduce the spread of COVID-19, along with vaccination for everyone who is eligible. **ECECD is a state agency, so we align our mask guidance with the Department of Health and the Governor's new public health order** and are requiring masks for children ages two and above in indoor settings.

Many child care centers have been successful in implementing mask wearing for two-year-olds; however, staff should use **professional judgment** when assessing whether an individual child can safely wear a mask. A provider should never physically force a child to wear a mask or otherwise traumatize the child if they are unwilling or unable. However, to remain in compliance with health and safety requirements **providers must make a continuous, good faith effort to implement masking for all children ages two years and older.**

In instances where a child demonstrates a persistent unwillingness or inability to wear a mask, providers should document all attempts to encourage, promote, teach, and model the behavior to show efforts to comply.

2. *What do we do if a family does not want their two year old to wear a mask?*

Child care providers are responsible for ensuring that their center or home complies with the public health order and ECECD requirements. Child care providers are encouraged to share those requirements with their families and to discuss strategies that can be reinforced at home to support the child social-emotional needs. If a family refuses to mask their child (absent a written recommendation from a medical professional that the child cannot wear a mask), the **provider must still abide by the public health order and ECECD requirements** by ensuring all children ages two years and older in their care comply with the mask requirement.

3. *What do we do if a child refuses to wear a mask, regularly soils the mask, or is unable to wear it properly? Will we be penalized?*

You must make a **good faith effort to comply** with the requirements, to the extent possible. If a child refuses to wear a mask, please talk to the parent or guardian about possible solutions. It is encouraged that a child brings more than one clean mask a day, so masks can be changed if they become soiled.

4. *Do masks only protect others and not the one wearing the mask?*

Masks protect the wearer as well as others by preventing viral droplets (and, to some extent, aerosols) from coming in contact with the nose and mouth of the wearer. Filtration effectiveness of cloth masks depends on many factors, such as thread count, number of layers, type of fabric, and water resistance.

5. *Can a child be exempted from the mask mandate with a doctor's note? Can they be exempted if they test weekly?*

All staff as well as children two and over need to wear masks indoors at all times except when eating, drinking, or napping. In the rare cases where a child cannot wear a mask for **medical or disability** reasons, they need to present a note from a medical professional explaining why the child cannot wear a mask. **Testing for COVID-19 is not an alternative to wearing a mask.**

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Testing

1. *If a teacher or student has COVID symptoms, even if they think they are from allergies, do they need to test?*

Yes, if a **person has any of the symptoms of COVID they still need to test**, even if they may also have allergies or another condition with similar symptoms. The other option is to have a note from a physician saying the symptoms are not due to COVID.

2. *If a fully vaccinated staff member is exposed to a positive case, do they need a negative test before they come back to work?*

A fully vaccinated staff member who is exposed to a positive case and is asymptomatic is not required to quarantine; however, they should monitor for symptoms for 14 days and get tested on day 3-5. It is up to the employer if they want to wait for the negative test to allow the staff member to come back to work.

3. *If a class is put in quarantine for being close contacts to a positive case, do the children need to get negative tests before returning to class?*

Rapid response protocol should be followed. Negative tests are not required to return to class and cannot be used to end quarantine early.

4. *Can rapid antigen tests (self-tests) done at home be used for surveillance and/or for staff showing symptoms?*

DOH has advised that rapid antigen self-tests completed at home **should not be accepted for routine surveillance purposes**. VAULT is acceptable because while it is done at home, it is observed and sent off to a lab for PCR testing.

5. *What is the procedure to get Vault tests for staff?*

Individuals can order their own Vault test at learn.vaulthealth.com/nm. If you are using Vault for weekly surveillance, please order several days ahead to allow for turn-around time.

6. *How can I find a testing site?*

The best way to find a testing site near you is to go to the DOH website COVID-19 Screening & Testing Sites directory at cvprovider.nmhealth.org/directory.html.

7. *If an unvaccinated provider is infected, DOH guidance says they could test positive for up to 90 days. Do they need to test weekly during the 90 days after coming back to work?*

After a confirmed COVID-19 infection, an unvaccinated person who otherwise meets the requirement for weekly testing would not have to test weekly until **after 90 days from the date of their positive test**. Proof of the positive test/infection must be provided to be exempt from surveillance testing for 90 days.

Isolation and Quarantine

1. *If someone is vaccinated and positive for COVID is quarantine needed?*

Yes, anyone (vaccinated or unvaccinated) who has a positive test needs to **isolate for at least ten days from the test date** (longer if symptoms are still present or the person is hospitalized). See DOH guidance document for more details [here](#).

2. *My vaccinated assistant tested positive yesterday and since I am vaccinated, I don't have to quarantine. How does this make sense?*

If you have been in close contact with someone who is positive, you should do two things:

1. **Get tested.** Testing on day 3-5 after exposure is recommended for everyone regardless of vaccination status to determine if you are contagious and may spread the disease to others, including members of your own household.

2. **Quarantine for 10 days if you are unvaccinated.** Your last day of self-quarantine is 10 days after your last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19. Continue to monitor for symptoms for the full 14 days and continue to follow COVID-19 safe practices. Quarantine is not required if you are vaccinated unless you are symptomatic, although you should monitor for symptoms for 14 days and get tested again if symptoms develop. However, if you feel there is a strong likelihood you are infected, you can choose to quarantine until you can get tested.

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Isolation and Quarantine *Continued*

3. *What happens if there is a positive case in a classroom? If staff members' children are sent home for quarantine due to exposure at school, can the teacher still come to work?*

If there is a positive case in a classroom the rapid response protocol is followed. A staff member whose child is sent home for quarantine can still work unless the staff member themselves becomes a close contact to someone who is positive. If that happens, they will follow the advice for exposure of a vaccinated or unvaccinated person (for example, if their own child tests positive, then they would need to quarantine and test if unvaccinated or test and monitor for symptoms if vaccinated).

4. *If a staff member's child tests positive, can the teacher still come to work?*

See above.

5. *What is the definition of close contact? Does it change for vaccinated vs. unvaccinated?*

The definition of close contact does not change regardless of vaccination status.

PreK settings should follow the PED guidance below for defining close contacts. For centers that care for younger children (less than three) we assume it is not possible to maintain 3 ft of distance consistently throughout the day so we will use the original definition of close contact (anyone who came within six feet of the infected individual for a total of 15 minutes in a 24 hour period).

PED protocol (from their toolkit) is [here](#):

A **“close contact”** in a school is defined as:

- Anyone who came within six feet of the infected individual (even while wearing a mask) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.
- Exception: In the PreK – 12 setting (including transportation), the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) **where**
 - both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting face masks; and
 - other K–12 school prevention strategies (such as universal and correct mask use, physical distancing, increased ventilation) were in place in the K–12 school setting. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the PreK – 12 setting.

6. *If a school closes for a rapid response period, what is your recommendation to OST programs that operate in school facilities; should they close for that period as well?*

OST programs should follow their school district's guidance in this situation.

7. *If someone does their weekly test right after being vaccinated, can the vaccine cause a positive test result?*

No. The tests that detect current infection react to the presence of virus. There are no viral particles in the vaccine, so it cannot cause a positive test result.

8. *What happens if there is a positive case in an infant classroom?*

Rapid response protocol is followed. Find the Rapid response protocol [here](#).

Travel

1. *If a teacher or student travels out of state or out of the country do they have to quarantine or test before they can return to school?*

If you travel internationally, you will probably need a negative test in order to return to the US. Airlines also have their own testing requirements.

See DOH guidance document for out of state travel information [here](#).

Other

1. *Will childcare assistance contracts continue to be paid out even if we choose to be conservative and close and quarantine for ten days after a positive case?*

Temporary closures of up to **ten days** will be paid.

2. *How many children in NM are currently infected with COVID?*

DOH puts out a periodic update on **pediatric cases** that can be found at www.cv.nmhealth.org under the tab that says Epidemiology Reports.

- For more helpful resources visit [here](#).